

Fort Wayne, Ind.

When a searchlight is thrown on the activities of the Communists in the jobless movement in Fort Wayne, a picture is shown that is interesting but to which little attention has been paid in the Communist press. It may be true that the main task of Communists today is to gain a foothold in the large industrial centers. Yet, it should not be overlooked that it is also important to build a network of organizations all over the country. It is important to establish our movement in small centers that are closely in touch with the countryside and from there penetrate into the real rustic communities. In many European countries, notably Finland, we see the disastrous results of "Red" cities and reactionary countrysides. And that should be avoided in U. S. A., even if agriculture plays a less major part in the economic life of the country. For that kind of work, for the establishment of Communist groups in small towns, where the majority of the population has recently come from the farms, where there are no radical traditions, but strong religious sentiments, and firm belief in "old glory" and the "land of the free", for such work, the experiences in Fort Wayne are valuable indeed.

Further, we can also see a picture of the party in action. We shall see what the sectarian course of the three last years has done, what results the "enlightenment campaign" has accomplished. We shall see how difficult it will be to get away from the inheritance of these three years of ultra-leftism, may the party leaders ever so much call for "new turns", may they even repudiate the whole course and admit that they were wrong. Many members will no doubt prefer to drop out, rather than give up the golden dreams of revolution right round the corner.

* * *

Sectarianism Defeated

When the unemployed movement started, there were representatives of the Communist Party as well as of the Communist Opposition in it. The two were of about equal strength but both very weak, a tiny minority even among the few workers that started the movement. Both operated fairly independent of their respective headquarters, with no outside help in the form of speakers or otherwise. But both managed to get their voices heard, having a more systematic approach to the problems involved than the other workers. In fact, in the early days it was the Communists who dominated the discussions and gave expressions to the sentiment of the workers. But while the Opposition made a realistic analysis of the problems they were up against, the party members took the well known attitude that they had been taught by their leaders. "We are members of the party, therefore we are the leaders, therefore we are right on all questions, and that does not have to be proven or even pointed out." On concrete issues, this attitude reflected itself most sharply on the question of collection of food for the unemployed. With groceries throwing away car-loads that couldn't be sold every week and with farmers close to town, glad to get rid of what they couldn't sell, the Opposition saw the possibilities of such work. It also could see this way as a good way of rallying the masses and, once this was done, more radical steps could be taken. The course of events has completely borne this out. The party members, on the other hand, insisted on evictions as the starting point. Some victim should be found, his furniture should be set back in, and then, they argued, the workers would rush into the council, militant demonstrations could be staged, and more relief would be forthcoming. This theory was never tried in practise, the workers were somewhat sceptical of it, and preferred the program of the Opposition.

The scheme of collecting food was derided as "organized beggary" by the party members. But when they were pinned down on the issue, when, for instance, it was

pointed out to them that the fourteenth plenum of their own party explicitly calls for such activities, they would answer as follows: "We don't have to read those decisions in order to know the policies of the party on that point. It is for the W.I.R. to collect food, not for an unemployed council. As long as we have no section of the W. I. R. in town, we can collect no food". The same plenum mentions the "mechanical approach" that many party members have to their work. There seem to be some reason for that.

Now, there were also points on which the two groups agreed, and where they cooperated. When a party member made a motion to elect delegates to the Hunger March that the party organized last Summer, the Opposition supported this and the motion was passed. Five delegates were elected. But then, when the party man informed them as to when the march would take place, it happened that the day arrived, and

the delegates were ready but no marchers appeared. Later on, the march actually came off, and it was announced that a detachment would go thru Fort Wayne, hold a meeting while there and pick up delegates. Again, nobody showed up, the detachment had in the last minute picked another route, and the crowd that was waiting for a meeting was sadly disappointed.

Other attempts that the unemployed made to get in touch with the unemployed movement of the party didn't fare any better. It was on a motion from an Opposi-

tion member that a letter was written to the national center of the unemployed councils in New York. The letter asked for information as to their membership, as to the demands they raised, as to the methods they used in putting them over, and what success they had had in this respect. Also, the letter inquired about conditions for affiliation. No answer came, but on a second letter they got provoked. The answer was signed by H. Benjamin himself, and stated that the only condition for affiliation was acceptance of the demand for unemployed insurance with full wages, and whatever goes with it. Further, the council would have to stage "militant demonstrations", and fight against evictions in a "revolutionary way." As to membership or success in getting his demands granted, Comrade Benjamin didn't commit himself.

All this happened in the early days of the movement. Later on, as it grew, and assumed a mass character, the party men faded into insignificance. They were on a couple of occasions nominated for some minor offices but they refused to accept. From the very beginning, they regarded it as below their dignity to do day-to-day work in the movement, so naturally whatever following they once had, they have lost. It once happened that they brought some speaker down, who immediately attacked the council here as a fake, as an agency of the bosses and what not. Certainly, the party has had its chances to teach this council a little better. But they have let the chances go, due to their lack of willingness to work with organizations that don't accept their program 100% and also due to the chaos that reigns in the party and in its work.

* * *

Forging Ahead

As to the Opposition, the first article dealt with some of the things it has succeeded in making the council do. At the time this is written, the council is taking a more radical attitude than ever before. It has just presented a series of demands, such as moratorium on rents, free gas, light and water, a moratorium on installment payments on homes, free clothing and shoes for all persons, married or single, children and adults, etc., and that is largely, if not wholly due to the influence of the Communist Party (Opposition). And the majority of the workers know this. The Opposition has not signed up scores of members that will be given the tasks of old-timers in our movement, and therefore give up and drop out after a couple of weeks. Neither has it tried by boisterous bravado to get into the headlines. But it has succeeded in really establishing a fertile field for itself and the ideas of Communism. The workers are willing to listen to us because they know we are their friends and because without us they would be far worse off. With persistent efforts and patient work, the Communist Party (Opposition) feels confident that it will be able to root itself among the workers in Fort Wayne.